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DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA
ENERGY FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: WHAT NEXT FOR HOUSE OF REPS?

REF: ABUJA 2300 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) As reported reftel, Representative Patricia Etteh (PDP, Osun State) stepped down from her position as Speaker of the House on October 30, ending weeks of confusion and stalemate in the legislature. Both Etteh and Babangida Nguroje (PDP, Taraba), who also stepped down from the Deputy Speaker position, retain their seats in the House unless or until they resign, are recalled by their constituencies, or are indicted in a court of law. Etteh made history as the first female Speaker in Nigeria, but she has now made her mark as the shortest-lived Speaker in Nigeria's history. Representative Terngu Tsegba (PDP, Benue) was made Speaker Pro Tempore, and he has pledged to preside over the election of a new Speaker soon. President Yar'Adua's spokesman has publicly praised the resignations and urged the House to return speedily to business.

¶2. (U) The press reports and National Assembly staffers confirm that Etteh and Nguroje finally tendered their resignations as the House was poised to impeach them. 255 members of the House voted to make Rep. Tsegba, a member of the anti-Etteh "Integrity Group," Speaker Pro Tempore, while pro-Etteh Rep. West Idahosa received only 33 votes. A House staffer told Poloff that the Integrity Group had obtained 260 signatures to impeach the Speaker and Deputy Speaker. Faced with imminent impeachment, Nguroje first tendered his resignation and Etteh followed suit a few minutes later after several Members knelt down on the House floor and begged her to do the same.

¶3. (C) Leadership positions in Nigeria are "zoned" by region to ensure geographic and ethnic balance in this diverse society. The next Speaker is therefore expected to be a Yoruba from the Southwest, like Etteh. Though initial reports indicated that a new Speaker would be elected October 31, it appears that the vote has been postponed until November 6. Dimeji Bankole (PDP, Osun) and Olugbenga Onigbogi (PDP, Ogun) are reportedly top candidates for the job. Bankole is a second-term member of the House from a well-connected political family. He studied in the United States and England. (COMMENT. Bankole is a member of the Integrity Group and has been a frank interlocutor in recent meetings with Poloffs, particularly with regard to the Etteh scandal. END COMMENT.) Onigbogi is an accountant also serving his second term in the House.

14. (C) COMMENT: Etteh's forced resignation shows that the National Assembly, though dominated by the ruling People's Democratic Party and filled with Members who came to power through less than credible elections, may become a force to be reckoned with in Nigerian politics as individual members begin to flex their political muscles. The Representatives refused to toe the party line and allow a pro-Etteh Member to become Speaker Pro Tempore, despite pressure from the PDP leadership (and presumably from Obasanjo). President Yar'Adua's refusal to intervene in the House crisis, and his public statement praising its resolution, demonstrate that the National Assembly has greater freedom now than under the previous regime. If the Assembly is able to organize itself and take advantage of this new freedom, it bodes well for Nigerian democracy, as the constitutionally-intended balance of power between branches could start to have some meaning. There may, however, be quite a learning curve for many Members who have rarely been given the chance to act as a meaningful legislative body. End comment.
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